

Third Place Junior Essay  
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### Sudan Military Injustice

As I look back at my life I realized I finally have achieved my life's goal of dwindling down the numbers of children at war in Sudan and South Sudan. To get the full picture of this you will need some backstory. It all started when I was deciding what college to attend. After touring a lot of different colleges, I decided to go somewhere out of my home country. I decided to go somewhere in Africa. I have always been up for an adventure and Africa seemed like the perfect fit for me. I eventually chose Sudan University of Science and Technology.

When my flight arrived in Sudan I went straight to my dorm. I was so surprised at how the city appeared different than any city in America. On my way to the university I saw a group of kids who looked like teenagers, just a little younger than me, surrounded by adults. The adults were all carrying guns and both the teens and adults were wearing military camo. These adults and teens looked to be training like the military videos I had seen on tv. I kept seeing these groups around Sudan and decided to do a little online research. I found out that Sudan's military uses teens and kids as workers. I also learned that there are about sixteen thousand kids and teens in the military in Sudan and South Sudan. That meant that sixteen thousand kids and teens were afraid for their lives every day training to fight for their country. It was within my first week in Sudan that I decided to make a movement along with others to stop kids in the military in Sudan and South Sudan.

First I had to find people who could aid me in my mission to stop kids joining the Sudan and South Sudan military. I had to be careful because I did not want to become a target on my

university campus. Slowly I made friends and began to see what other people thought about the kids joining the military so young. After my sophomore year, I had a following of about 100 other students who shared my passion to stop the military from allowing kids and teens to join. It was then that we decided to go straight to the Sudan capital and try to make a compromise. The government immediately kicked us out. What was even worse was our university found out and threatened to kick us out if we did not stop our movement. Our group met after the university's threat and almost everyone decided to stop the movement and stay at the university. A small group of about eight of us decided we were going to keep fighting for the kids in Sudan.

Deciding to stay with the movement was one of the hardest decisions of my life. I knew it was the right thing to do, but I also wanted to finish my education. A family I had met from South Sudan offered the small group of us left to stay in their garage while we planned our next steps. The garage was small and we slept on sleeping bags on the dirt floor. We decided our next step would be contacting the United Nations to help stop the injustice in Sudan and South Sudan. To our surprise the United Nations responded that we were too small of a group and they could not help. When we received the response from the United Nations I felt very defeated. I did not think we would ever be able to make a difference. It was at that moment our group decided we would give everything we could for the next three hundred and sixty-five days. At the end of the year we would either have a solution or be forced to move home.

We began the final year by protesting the military we were trying to help. We showed up every day and gave the malnourished kids hot meals and cold water. At first the military members were very rude to us, but after several months of us showing up every day they began to look forward to our coming. Eventually we even gained help from some of the military men. Slowly our numbers began to grow. We began that year of protest with eight and after six

months we were up to about three hundred people. The three hundred grew to five hundred and by the time the year was coming to an end we were at almost one thousand protesters. The movement was really getting big and we decided even though our year was over we would keep it going.

We continued to protest every day. Thousands of people were joining us and helping provide food and water for the kids that were training with the military. Our protests soon were full of people from Sudan of all ages and even military personnel. Because so many were protesting, the United Nations took notice. They decided to hold a conference with Sudan and South Sudan's leaders. The meeting lasted about three hours and we all sat in the streets and waited for the decision. At first they agreed to shrink their numbers of children in the military by four thousand each, leaving the total number at eight thousand.

When the decision was announced the people in the streets of Sudan began to protest louder than before. Quickly the entire world began to join the protest. People all over the world were protesting kids in the military. It was the largest number of protesters ever to join a cause.

The United Nations realized how passionate the people were and came back the next day with a different decision. They decided to outlaw anyone being able to join any military before the age of eighteen in any nation in the world. It was then after a little over three years of work I reached my goal of ending the injustice of children joining the military. Many people cannot believe that a twenty-two-year-old kid from the United States can make a difference in the world, but after a little suffering and a lot of work, I made a difference. I also got reaccepted into the Sudan University of Science and Technology and was able to finish my degree. Looking back at the decisions I made although they were hard they were all worth it.